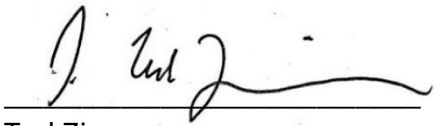




Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship

WSA Objectives Interim Policy

APPLICATION:	Developing Objectives under section 43 of the <i>Water Sustainability Act (WSA)</i>
ISSUANCE:	Executive Director, Watershed Stewardship and Security Branch, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, and Comptroller, Water Management Branch, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
IMPLEMENTATION:	BC Public Service and Partner Governments
LEGISLATIVE REFERENCES:	<i>Water Sustainability Act</i> (Ch. 15, S.B.C 2014) Water Sustainability Regulation (B.C. Reg. 36/2016) [WSR]
RELATED POLICIES:	Not Applicable
RELATIONSHIP TO PREVIOUS POLICIES:	Original Policy
POLICY AMENDMENT PROCESS:	To amend this policy a request must be made in writing to the Executive Director, Watershed Stewardship and Security Branch, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship and the Comptroller, Water Management Branch, Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship.



Ted Zimmerman
Executive Director
Watershed Stewardship and Security Branch
Ministry of Water, Land and Resource
Stewardship

March 22, 2024

Date



Connie Chapman
Executive Director and Comptroller
Water Management Branch
Ministry of Water, Land and Resource
Stewardship

April 10, 2024

Date

APPROVED AMENDMENTS:		
Effective date	Approval date	Description/Summary of Changes:
April 10, 2024	April 10, 2024	New Interim Policy

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1. INTERIM POLICY STATEMENT

This policy describes the Province's approach to developing WSA Objectives under *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA) section 43. This interim policy provides guidance on what WSA Objectives are, how they may be developed, including roles and responsibilities, and how they may be adapted for different governance approaches. This policy is intended for provincial, First Nations, federal and local governments, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in British Columbia (B.C.) who may be partners in initiating, developing, or implementing WSA Objectives under WSA s.43. The guide outlines actions to be consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the UN Declaration) during WSA Objectives development and implementation. It is recommended that individuals read the **WSA Objectives Technical Guidance** document as a complementary document to this policy. Companion documents may be developed in support of this policy to provide additional guidance and information.

The Interim Policy will be updated periodically based on learnings from the completion of WSA Objectives development and implementation projects.

2. REASON FOR POLICY

The purpose of this interim policy is to:

- Define key terms used in WSA Objectives development;
- Outline the statutory authority to develop WSA Objectives;
- Provide an overview of WSA Objectives;
- Review the benefits and limitations of using WSA Objectives;
- Convey the key recommended principles for developing WSA Objectives;
- Describe the key roles and responsibilities in developing WSA Objectives;
- Outline the expectations for B.C. to engage and collaborate in developing WSA Objectives with:
 - First Nations governments,
 - Local governments, and
 - interested parties; and
- Describe the WSA Objectives proposed development framework and the recommended policy and procedures for initiating, developing, and implementing WSA Objectives.

3. DEFINITIONS

Relevant terms defined under WSA s.1 [definitions]: Aquatic ecosystem, aquifer, Crown land, groundwater, public officer, stream, water objective, water sustainability plan

Relevant terms defined under Water Sustainability Regulation (WSR) s.1 [definitions]: fish habitat, licensee

Terms not defined in the WSA or WSR:

The definitions below are intended to provide clarity and guidance and do not carry legal authority and should not be interpreted as the definitive description of the concepts.

“Collaboration”: is when actors exchange knowledge, offer different contributions and share decision-making power, through an agreed upon arrangement process (e.g., Terms of Reference).

“Component”: The four watershed system parts that must be understood to develop WSA Objectives, and that will inform the development of the conceptual model: surface water quantity, surface water quality, groundwater quantity and quality, and aquatic biota and habitat.

“Conceptual Model”: A written and/or visual communication tool that illustrates the watershed system profile, including the linkages between the key components (defined above) and highlights technical knowledge gaps. Conceptual models should generally consist of a narrative description of the relationships with accompanying tables and graphical representations.

“Decision Maker”: The person who is authorized to make a decision. Statutory decision makers in the provincial government are a type of **public officer**.

“Engagement”: Engagement aims to build relationships by exchanging information in the absence of legal consultation obligations. The purpose of engagement is to build trust and create meaningful relationships. This includes information sharing regarding regulations, policy, legislation and procedures.

“Indicators”: The measures selected to gauge the condition of a watershed system. Ideal indicators are simple measurable criteria that provide proxies for more complex processes.

“Initiating Entity”: Undertakes initial work to prepare a WSA Objectives proposal, including identifying issues and priorities, and potential partners in the area of interest, and that WSA Objectives are an appropriate tool to respond to the issues identified in the proposal.

“Objectives Area”: Following WSA s.43(1)(a), the area being considered for the development of WSA Objectives. The area can be a watershed, stream, aquifer, or any other geographically defined area.

“Partnership”: is where actors are equal partners (e.g., government-to government relationship), responsibility is equitably shared, and decisions are made together, ideally through consensus.

“Project Sponsor” Initiates a WSA Objectives project, manages the work of the Working Group and endorses a WSA Objectives proposal before it goes for decision. Project sponsors may include an executive staff member within provincial government, local government or a First Nation representative.

“Representative Government”: In B.C., this includes First Nations, local governments, the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia. Following WSA s.43(5), when the term ‘local governments’ is used in this policy, it includes local governments, regional districts, and local trust committees.

“Specified uses of water”: Broader than ‘water use purposes’ as defined in WSA s.1 and may include uses associated with rights identified under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

“Strategies”: Describes the management actions that will be implemented to progress towards meeting an objective. Strategies may apply to all or part of the Objectives area.

“Sustain”: Refers to maintaining, supporting or strengthening a process over time. Actions which not only preserve the water(shed) systems and the uses it supports when the system is in good condition, but can also strengthen, promote restoration or enhancement of water systems, if such actions are necessary for enjoyment of the specified uses(s) or to improve the health of aquatic ecosystems.

“Value(s) for water”: The regard that water is perceived to deserve; the importance, worth, or usefulness of water. More specifically, the value(s) a community places on water, which will inform what objectives are developed.

“Watershed”: Watersheds are areas of land where rain, snow and glacier runoff flow into common rivers, lakes, streams or aquifers. They are homes to species, like wild salmon, give water for drinking and growing our food, support jobs and work for people, and have significant cultural and spiritual value for local communities.

“Watershed Community”: Contributes to perspectives on values and priorities for the watershed during engagement discussions; will vary by community and watershed.

“Water Quality Objectives” (WQO): WQOs are science-based numerical targets or narrative statements representing low-risk conditions to protect the most sensitive values for water and uses for a specific waterbody, such as aquatic life, human health from the consumption of fish or water, wildlife use, recreation, or cultural uses.

“Water Sustainability Plan”: as defined under [WSA s.43](#), means a water sustainability plan accepted under [WSA s.75 \(1\) or \(3\) \[acceptance of plan\]](#);

“WSA Objective”: A water objective, as defined under the [WSA s.43](#), is an objective that describes a desired current or future state for water quality, water quantity (both surface and groundwater), or an aquatic ecosystem. It can be narrative in nature, or quantitative. Ideally, it will be measurable, either directly or indirectly, to facilitate evaluating for whether the objective is being achieved over time.

4. LEGISLATION

A list of relevant legislation is provided below for reference. Refer to the Act for specific wording of a section. Additional provisions may also apply. The section noted below is provided for convenience; should it differ from what is listed in the legislation or regulation, the legislation or regulation takes priority.

[WSA s.43](#) [*Water objectives*] provides the authority to establish WSA Objectives for a watershed, stream, aquifer or other specified area or environmental feature or matter in order to sustain water quality and water quantity for specified uses and/or to sustain aquatic ecosystems.

5. GENERAL POLICY

5.1 Introduction to WSA Objectives

WSA Objectives, enabled under [WSA s.43](#), are a flexible area-based planning tool for setting a desired state to sustain aquatic ecosystems and/or provide for specified uses of water. The goal of WSA Objectives is to conserve and manage values for water connected to **human health and well-being and aquatic ecosystem health** that are identified by the provincial, First Nations, federal, and/or local governments and communities within a defined area.

As a regulatory and policy tool, WSA Objectives can enable consistent protection for human health and aquatic values across specified decisions within law. They can be approved as regulations, where they may become legal requirements, or as policy, where they serve as guidelines.

When developed collaboratively, WSA Objectives can reflect the values and priorities of a watershed community as they connect to water quality, water quantity and aquatic ecosystems. The result should be WSA Objectives that improve water outcomes for a specified area by clearly stating water management priorities for specified decision makers. WSA Objectives should not unreasonably restrict development or economic activity within an area, but rather ensure that water values are conserved and managed. Developing WSA Objectives will concentrate primarily on key stressors within watersheds, not every human activity.

5.2 Using WSA Objectives

Integrating WSA Objectives into area-based planning supports a sustainable approach to resource development affecting watershed health in B.C. and establishes a framework to protect long-term access to water for communities, ecosystems, and businesses. WSA Objectives may be developed on their own or as part of a broader planning initiative, such as through a Water Sustainability Plan or a modernized land use plan.

Under s.43 WSA Objectives can be used to (non-exhaustive list):

- create common water management goals for a watershed area that consider the cumulative impacts of different land and water activities
- support consistency in resource management
- support consistency in how water values are considered in decision making for provincially and some locally regulated activities in the area
- add legal authority or scope to existing policies and strategies by requiring government decision makers to consider WSA Objectives under provincial and some local government legislation¹
- identify recommendations to restore an aquatic ecosystem to improve outcomes for the aquatic ecosystem or specified uses of water quality or water quantity
- replace, enhance or extend existing approaches across statutes to meet water management goals within a watershed

Additionally, WSA Objectives build on and in the case of insufficient Objectives, can supersede them, existing strategies and initiatives in an area, such as:

- Objectives related to water under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA)
- First Nations water laws or policies
- Local government bylaws or plans that describe priorities or objectives for water

5.3 Limitations of WSA Objectives

WSA Objectives is a forward-looking tool that influences future decisions made by public officials under specified laws. They can only affect new statutory decisions that are made after the Objectives take effect. Any rights and permissions issued before WSA Objectives come into force would not be affected unless they are revisited for the purpose of an amendment or other change. Providing a regulation is developed, as opposed to a WSA Objectives policy, then a decision maker would need to consider the objectives as they are in effect.

¹ For example, consideration of WSA Objectives related to water quality could become a requirement for decisions under the WSA, the *Mines Act*, *Lands Act*, and/or the *Forest Range and Practices Act* (FRPA) when related regulated activities may affect a watershed.

The scope of WSA Objectives is limited to developing objectives for sustaining water quantity, water quality (for stream and groundwater) or sustaining aquatic ecosystems. There may be cases where WSA Objectives alone are not sufficient to address issues or priorities in a watershed such as when needing to set water aside for a specific purpose through a [WSA s. 39](#) water reservation. In such cases, provincial staff involved in the WSA Objectives process can recommend use of another water management tool that may better address the desired outcomes.

5.4 Engagement and Collaboration

Working with First Nations and local governments to understand existing laws and policies and how they may inform the development of WSA Objectives is an important part of the process. First Nations, local governments, and the federal government whose territories or jurisdiction overlap with the area proposed for WSA Objectives must be provided with the opportunity to engage and consult on the project. An invitation to participate as a project partner may also be extended. Participating in a WSA Objectives project is optional, at the discretion of each government.

First Nations Governments and Rights and Title Holders

[B.C.'s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) will inform how WSA Objectives are developed. Opportunities for co-development, co-management and co-governance with Indigenous governing bodies shall be explored during all stages of WSA Objectives development. Unless immediate environmental concerns or concerns related to public safety restrict the opportunity for collaboration, occasions for engagement, collaboration and partnership with First Nations shall be provided through participation, partnership, or leadership in the WSA Objectives working and/or advisory groups. A distinctions-based approach may also be utilized to engage with Nations who may wish to participate outside of the working and/or advisory groups.

All aspects of a WSA Objectives development project can be informed and influenced by First Nations laws, protocols, principles, and knowledge. This policy recognizes that First Nations governments and communities have long-held stewardship and management knowledge, responsibilities and information that may be important to the development of effective WSA Objectives.

Free, Prior and Informed Consent

Establishing processes to enable the free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) to be exercised during decisions that relate to WSA Objectives development will be prioritized, whether a First Nation is part of the Working Group or not. The WSA Objectives initiating entity is encouraged to seek FPIC from First Nations who either want to be partners in the WSA Objectives development project, or to seek their consent to proceed with the project, regardless of their involvement. The criteria to identify which First Nations may have an interest in the project is to look at the area of interest for WSA Objectives and identify those First Nations whose territories overlap with the project area.

Local Governments, Regional Districts and Municipalities

Local governments have a unique role and perspective in planning and decision-making processes related to provincial public lands within, and bordering, their jurisdictional boundaries. Opportunities to engage and collaborate with local governments will be explored during the development of WSA Objectives, and local government participation at the working group and/or advisory group level should be sought, as appropriate.

Opportunities to partner with regional districts in the development of WSA Objectives must be pursued when objectives are being considered to influence developing, amending or adopting regional growth strategies under Part 13 of the *Local Government Act*.

Opportunities to partner with municipalities in the development of WSA Objectives must be pursued when objectives are being considered to influence developing, amending or adopting official community plans under Part 14 of the *Local Government Act* or under section 29 of the *Islands Trust Act*.

Government of Canada

There may be scenarios where collaboration with the Government of Canada is necessary to develop WSA Objectives that reflect input from the respective jurisdictions of provincial and federal resource management. Salmon, for example, are an aquatic species that have both marine and freshwater ecosystem requirements, and WSA Objectives that include or affect salmon habitat may require working together for effective management.

Others in the Watershed Community

Opportunities for engagement and collaboration with industry, public, and non-governmental entities that comprise a watershed community will be explored during the development of WSA Objectives. The members of a watershed community and the extent of the engagement will depend on the planning area size and the nature of the interests within the objective's area. Examples of some typical sector interests that may be included are agriculture, recreational fisheries, forestry, and watershed organizations that undertake research, monitoring and reporting.

6. POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR DEVELOPING WSA OBJECTIVES

This section outlines a recommended framework for developing WSA Objectives to support efficiency, consistency, due diligence, and information and data sharing. WSA Objectives development may follow the recommended approach. However, project partners (initiating entities) can agree to use another collaboration and decision-making approach.

Alternative WSA Objectives development approaches might be appropriate when WSA Objectives are developed to support another initiative which has its own governance structure (e.g., an existing shared decision-making forum) or where exceptional

circumstances necessitate an expedited process (e.g., natural disaster response). If using alternative approaches, ensure that the Province is included as a project partner or lead, that any legal obligations triggered by WSA Objectives development are fulfilled (e.g., First Nations consultation on legislation development), and the governance structures within each partner organization are respected (e.g., internal approval chains within provincial, First Nations or local governments).

At any point during WSA Objectives development, the Working Group partners may decide to discontinue work on a WSA Objectives project by providing a summary recommendation to the project sponsor(s) that describes the work completed to date and the rationale for discontinuing work. Upon endorsement of the recommendation from the project sponsor(s) the Working Group shall dissolve.

Recommended WSA Objectives Development Framework

The following sub-sections describe the six phases of the recommended collaborative framework approach for developing WSA Objectives and provide policy and procedure guidance for entities working (see page 14 for more information on initiating entities) to develop WSA Objectives. This framework has been developed to support the implementation of WSA Objectives, however, ensure you engage with project partners and interest holders early to determine the best approach for your watershed and circumstance.

The six recommended WSA Objectives development framework phases include:

- 1) Issue Identification;
- 2) Objective Initiation;
- 3) Work Planning;
- 4) WSA Objectives Development;
- 5) Implement WSA Objectives and Strategies; and
- 6) Monitoring and Adaptive Management.

Figure 2 below demonstrates the recommended WSA Objectives Development Framework's process flow and Table 1 (next page) summarizes the six phases and their planning/governance and technical deliverables; however final deliverables and products may differ depending on the specifics of a project.

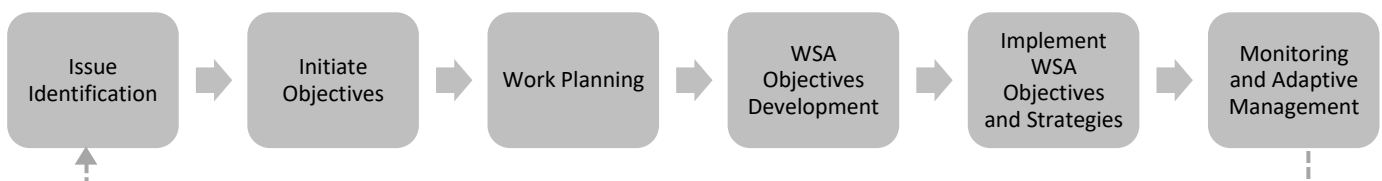


Figure 2. Recommended WSA Objective development framework

It is recommended that WSA Objectives are founded on the following principles:

1. be developed and implemented in alignment with the UN Declaration;
2. promote and implement beneficial land and water management practices and technologies to prevent harm and support potential future water uses;
3. foster collaboration through respectful relationships such that all First Nations, governments, agencies and interested parties can engage in mutually respectful dialogue about water objectives;
4. sustain the values, priorities and activities that a watershed community identifies as important;
5. respect approaches and initiatives that are already functioning well; and,
6. engage partners in setting WSA Objectives and evaluating the impact to the extent that they are willing and able.

Except for Principle 1, the principles can be tailored to a specific project context as desired. Additional principles can be created and adopted by a working group that is developing WSA Objective upon agreement by the project partners.

Table 1. Summary of WSA Objective development phases and deliverables.

Phase	Goal	Planning and Governance Deliverables	Technical Deliverables*
1) Identify Priorities and Propose Project	Identify watershed-specific issues, values and priorities, and determine if WSA Objectives is an appropriate tool	Documentation of collaborative issues, values & priorities Complete proposal for WSA Objectives	Scoping Level Information Review
2) Initiate WSA Objectives Project	Obtain endorsement of the WSA proposal and agreement on partnership from all partner’s leadership	Letter(s) of endorsement Statement of intent/agreement	WSA Objectives Proposal
3) Work Planning	Obtain a clear understanding of the commitments and resourcing in place and begin collaborative work planning	Documentation of engagement and collaboration processes Working Group Advisory Group(s) Project Charter Work plan Communication plan	Conceptual Model

4) WSA Objectives Development	Develop draft WSA Objectives Submission for approval	WSA Objectives Recommendations Submission Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan Approval of WSA Objectives Possible regulatory development	Technical Assessment
5) Implement WSA Objectives and Strategies	Communicate and implement the approved WSA Objectives	Outreach and implementation Implementation Strategies	
6) Monitoring and Adaptive Management	Conduct periodic review and evaluation for the new WSA Objectives	Responsive, flexible and adaptive in response to changing circumstances and new evidence	

*More information on technical deliverables is provided in the [WSA Objectives Technical Guidance](#).

Phase 1) Issue or Priority Identification

The goals of this phase are to a) identify the issues, priorities, and values for the watershed, b) to determine if WSA Objectives are the appropriate tool, and c) to develop a proposal for a WSA Objectives project. Deliverables include documentation of watershed-specific issues and priority values; a scoping level information review; an engagement analysis, and a proposal for a WSA Objectives project.

Identifying WSA Objectives Values

Identifying watershed-specific issues, priorities and values early can help determine whether WSA Objectives is the most appropriate tool and help to inform WSA Objectives development. Before beginning a WSA Objectives development project, a representative government (e.g., WLRS), or partnership of representative governments should assess the suitability of WSA Objectives for addressing an identified issue or priority related to sustaining or restoring **aquatic ecosystem or human health and well-being values**. WSA Objectives will only be considered in situations where it is demonstrated that they are likely the best tool available to address the identified (current or potential future) issue or priority related to these values.

Watershed-specific values reflect a particular watershed’s community (including First Nations’), people, interests, and environment. They can include many different elements and connections to water, such as drinking water, cultural practices, spiritual connections,

livelihoods, transport, aquatic species (e.g., Northern rice root, kelp), or species dependent on the aquatic habitat (e.g., moose, salmon, beaver; see Figure 1 for more examples). Specific values connected to aquatic ecosystem or human health and well-being are often affected by regulated activities in a watershed.



Figure 1. Examples of specific watershed values under the broader vision.

Specific values can be identified by discussing and agreeing on the unique priority values for a watershed or specified area. Project members will bring their own cultural perspectives and priorities when discussing which values to prioritize. Multiple rounds of engagement may be needed to identify a set of shared values across the initiating partners and will be facilitated through development of a shared conceptual model. Values and issues will continue to be further refined throughout the entire WSA Objectives process as the group learns together.

Proposal to Initiate WSA Objectives

The WSA Objectives development process begins when a person or organization prepares a draft **proposal to initiate WSA Objectives**. By doing so, they become the **initiating entity**.

Initiating Entities

Given their role in local governance and direct impact by water related issues, representative governments within B.C. are considered to be the most appropriate entities to initiate WSA Objectives development, however the Province must always be at least a partner in a WSA Objectives development project.

Initiating entities can be:

- the provincial government (e.g., one lead and/or several partner ministries),
- a self-identified First Nations governing body or group of First Nations governments
- the federal government
- a NGO, or
- a local or regional government.

Before beginning development of WSA Objectives, the initiating entity should:

- Seek out opportunities for integration with existing planning/stewardship processes underway and determine whether any current process has the

governance structure, resourcing, and engagement venue to advance WSA Objectives (e.g., Forest Landscape Plan, Modernized Land Use Planning, or other);

- Seek support and participation from potential partner governments, including provincial government ministries with mandates to manage water within their statutes, First Nations government(s) whose treaty, reserve and/or asserted territories overlap with the area being considered for the Objectives and local government(s) with jurisdiction over the potential area;
- Identify one or more project sponsors for the WSA Objectives work;
- Have knowledge of the differences between a policy and regulation², and understand that the process may begin with pursuit of WSA Objectives through policy, and may turn into a regulation; and,
- Plan to obtain endorsement (described below) from the Province, with specific commitment to:
 - Nominate a Project Sponsor or Co-Sponsor from the Province, and
 - Nominate staff, as appropriate, to participate in or support the Working Group and technical advisory group.

Submitting a WSA Objectives Proposal

Submitting a WSA Objectives proposal for your project is the first step you will need to take. The purpose of submitting this proposal is to demonstrate the suitability of WSA Objectives for your project and obtain approval from the Province to begin WSA Objectives development..

The proposal should describe primary issues or priorities in a given area or watershed and be supported by readily available, verifiable information, including information and knowledge from First Nations, local, and other governments and communities, and programs such as the provincial Cumulative Effects Framework and existing environmental reporting. When partners are beginning work planning collaboratively, there will be further opportunity to revise and refine the issues and materials outlined in the proposal. Information in this document will support you in developing your proposal.

If the proposal to initiate submission is approved by the Province, the next step will be to complete a **Scoping Level Information Review**, which will be developed by the initiating entity, either independently or in collaboration with the potential partners. The **Scoping Level Information Review** includes:

- a) Desktop Data Inventory and preliminary review
- b) Analysis of Aboriginal Rights and Title and Treaty Rights
- c) Engagement Analysis

² Refer to the Policy Approaches Playbook for further information and considerations about regulatory and non-regulatory approaches to policy development (https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/about-the-bc-government/regulatory-reform/pdfs/policy_approaches_playbook.pdf)

- d) Preliminary Issue, Opportunity, and Priority Identification and Related Statutes
- e) Rationale for Developing WSA Objectives

Guidance on conducting a **Scoping Level Information Review** is available in [the WSA Objectives Technical Guidance document](#).

Phase 2) Initiate WSA Objectives Development

The objective of this phase is to obtain endorsement of the proposal to initiate WSA Objectives development and agreement on partnership from partner agencies. Key and technical deliverables include endorsement of the proposal to initiate WSA Objectives and an agreement/statement of intent from the government partners.

WSA Objectives Proposal Decision

A WSA Objectives proposal is submitted to the Province for endorsement before WSA Objectives development may begin. To obtain an endorsement, the initiating entity submits the proposal to the applicable Executive Director(s) (Ministry of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship (WLRs)) (or equivalent) for decision. The Province should document the reasoning of its decision to endorse or not endorse the proposal in writing and provide it to the initiating entity, as applicable. The criteria WLRs will use to determine whether to support and approve a WSA Objectives proposal are set out in [Appendix A](#).

Each representative government partner will need to undertake their own assessment of whether to support and approve a proposal to initiate a WSA Objectives project according to their own internal governance and decision-making structure. The decision to approve a proposal may be shared between the members of the initiating entity, depending on the governance arrangements in place or planned to be in place.

Signed Agreement

If all representative governments, including the Province, support the proposal to initiate a WSA Objectives project, a **formal signed agreement** between the initiating entity and any other partner agencies should be obtained that describes expectations and roles of each party during the development process. There are several types of agreements that could be used (such as a Terms of Reference or a Memorandum of Understanding) to document the agreement to work together. A signed agreement indicates the expectation that the representative government parties will participate in the WSA Objectives project as outlined in the agreement and assign resources, accordingly.

Phase 3) Work Planning

The objective of this phase is to achieve a clear understanding of the commitments and resourcing in place and begin collaborative work planning. During this phase, goals, deliverables, and resourcing are agreed-upon and assigned by the Working Group. Key and technical deliverables include:

- Establish a Working Group;
- Establish a Technical Advisory Group, a Watershed advisory group and/or any other advisory groups needed to support the Working Group;
- Develop a **Conceptual Model** to inform the development of a work plan (see **Technical Guidance document**); and
- Develop and deliver a work plan (**see Technical Guidance document**).

Key Roles and Responsibilities

WSA Objectives will see the strongest outcomes when they are developed through a watershed and governance approach that emphasizes inclusion, collaboration, and transparency among a watershed community. Specific roles and responsibilities anticipated for a WSA Objectives development project are listed in Appendix B.

Project Sponsors

The initiating entity will aim to formalize commitments with **Project Sponsor(s)** that can fairly and objectively provide leadership and project oversight for the WSA Objectives development project. Project Sponsors should be supported and empowered with decision making authority or to communicate a decision according to their representative government in order to make effective and efficient decisions as a member of the Working Group, where needed. Project sponsors may include an executive staff member within provincial government, local government, or a First Nation council member.

Working Group

When an area is identified for the development of WSA Objectives, the project sponsor(s) and initiating entity will assemble a Working Group to manage and implement the project. Where practical, project sponsor(s) should seek representation in the working groups from the following:

- Local government(s);
- First Nations government(s);
- Provincial government staff; and
- Other representative bodies that have direct influence over land or water management within the planning area, such as watershed boards or councils.

Depending on the issues, priorities and values in the area, it may also be desirable to include Federal government representation (e.g., where transboundary water issues are involved; where sustaining salmon populations is a priority).

Recommended Advisory Groups

- **Technical Advisory Group:** May be established to provide advice and analysis to support the development of WSA Objectives. This group will be responsible for undertaking or managing technical work outlined in the work plan. The Technical Advisory Group could include specialists with backgrounds in policy, surface water quantity, surface water quality, groundwater and aquatic biota and habitat.

Additional expertise may be needed depending upon the specific issues and features of the objectives area.

- **Watershed Advisory Group:** May be established to represent the diverse range of interests which may be affected by WSA Objectives. This group could include: industry representatives, community representatives, regional groups and other delegates. The Watershed Advisory Group's responsibilities include:
 - Provide advice to the Working Group on the concerns or interests of communities, industry or business sectors;
 - Collaborate with the Working Group to optimize the selection of strategies to achieve results efficiently and equitably; and
 - Act as liaison between the Working Group and key segments of the community and business sectors or industries within the project area that are not already represented on the Watershed advisory group.
- **Other Advisory Groups:** The Working Group may establish other advisory groups to assist in the development of WSA Objectives. The responsibilities of these advisory groups will be outlined by the Working Group and documented in the Project Charter.

Participation of First Nations Governments³

First Nations People comprise communities within Nations and governments. Many First Nations structures of governance are in the process of rebuilding after hundreds of years of continued impacts of colonization, and governance happens in numerous different ways. By First Nation governments we mean various institutional structures and organizations that First Nation communities have established to coordinate their business with other government entities and their broader membership. Whatever process is undertaken to develop WSA Objectives, when it is done collaboratively with a First Nations government, it is essential that each First Nations government defines its own means and approaches to implementing the UN Declaration and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

Note that participating First Nations governments may need time to articulate their values and undertake internal work to support fulsome participation within a WSA Objectives project. The WSA Objectives proposal and project processes should accommodate those needs.

Further, the Province recognizes that First Nations have the right to choose their institutions and work through those institutions. During the process to collaboratively

³ Advice in this section follows the guidance outlined in the First Nations Fisheries Council report "[Statement of Requirements for Water Governance in British Columbia According to Crown Commitments to Reconciliation](#)" (November 2018).

develop and implement WSA Objectives, the Province will respect and uphold First Nations institutions and decisions.

Conflicts of Interest

Conflicts of interest occur when an individual's private affairs or financial interests are in real or perceived conflict with their professional obligations and responsibilities. Steps must be taken to ensure that conflicts of interest are avoided when selecting membership for the working group and advisory groups. Members must identify potential conflicts of interest and discuss them with the Project Sponsor. Changes in membership or other actions may be necessary to prevent and address conflicts of interest.

Communication Plan

Developing a communications plan will be essential for updating project partners, groups, stakeholders, and individuals who live and work in the watershed about project progress and opportunities for engagement. A communications plan should include the following sections:

- o The identification of spokespeople and what is expected of them;
- o The development of consistent language for the working group and spokesperson to use when sharing project information;
- o Proposed content for sharing;
- o The targeted audience for receiving information;
- o An agreed upon list of communication platforms to share information on;
- o Roles and responsibilities of working group and advisory group(s) members when broader communication is required; and
- o A list of communication tools.

Phase 4) WSA Objectives Development

The objective of this phase is to develop draft WSA Objectives recommendations for submission and approval. Issues and values may also be defined in more detail during this phase, if required to support the objectives. Key and technical deliverables include a proposal for WSA Objectives and a technical assessment report.

WSA Objectives development follows five steps:

- a) Iterative engagement with the watershed community to prioritize values to focus the development of WSA Objectives for;
- b) Complete technical assessment;
- c) Drafting WSA Objectives and developing strategies to implement the objectives;
- d) Preparing WSA Objectives; and
- e) Delivering a recommendation for approval, if appropriate.

a) Engagement

The Province, with input from the Working Group, will be responsible for developing strategies for engaging community organizations, industries, sectors or advocacy groups whose interests might benefit from or be affected by the development of WSA Objectives. The Province will seek input from the public and others that may be affected by the implementation of WSA Objectives before approval is sought on a WSA Objectives submission.

b) Technical Assessment

A technical assessment should be completed to provide a defensible rationale for developing WSA Objectives. The assessment will build on the conclusions and outcomes of the **Scoping Level Information Review** and **Conceptual Model**. The final technical assessment report should create a technical narrative that describes each issue, its benchmark indicators, and options and strategies to implement the objective(s).

Refer to the **WSA Objectives Technical Guidance** for detailed information on completing a technical assessment and report.

c) Writing WSA Objectives

The working group will use the recommendations from the technical assessment report, among other considerations, to write proposed WSA Objectives. The proposed WSA Objectives will describe the target narrative or qualitative benchmarks for the selected indicators and strategies for achieving these benchmarks.

Further guidance on writing WSA Objectives is provided in **the WSA Objectives Technical Guidance**.

d) Preparing a WSA Objectives Recommendation Submission

A WSA Objectives recommendation must be submitted to the Province and project partners before WSA Objectives can be approved. The working group will be responsible for preparing a WSA Objectives submission which includes:

- The proposed WSA Objectives, including narrative or quantitative benchmarks;
- Detailed descriptions of the statutes, decisions, and public officers, as well as any recommended requirements deemed necessary to promote achievement of the objective;
- List of specified public officers that may be required to consider the objectives and under which statute(s) and for which decision(s) they must be considered;
- Factors or criteria for specified public officers to consider when evaluating the impacts of a land use or resource use proposal on the objectives;
 - Measures needed to address the impacts of such proposals on the objectives;
- Final spatial boundaries for each proposed WSA Objective, described in a manner that is legally defensible;

- How the WSA Objectives could influence public officers or specified decisions under specified legislation, including impacts to statutes, decisions, strategies, timelines and assignment of responsibility;
- How the WSA Objectives could impact regional growth strategies or official community plans under the *Local Government Act*, or planning processes under prescribed enactments, as applicable;
- An assessment of anticipated social or economic implications, and transition measures to address any socio-economic impacts of implementing the objectives, if applicable;
- A communications report, summarizing the process to develop the objectives, who was engaged during development and how the final WSA Objectives will be communicated;
- Strategies that have or will be developed to support implementation of objectives;
- The technical assessment report; and
- A Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan ([see Technical Guidance](#)).

The Working Group will need to ensure that parties, both inside and outside of government, whose interests, livelihoods or jurisdictions could be impacted by the development of WSA Objectives are identified and consulted. The summary of early engagement should be included in the proposal so it may inform the decisions of the representative governments.

e) Supporting Tools for Draft WSA Objectives

The working group is responsible for developing any decision support tools needed to accompany implementation of WSA Objectives. Guidance may need to be developed for public officials regarding any terms and conditions that are, following [WSA s.43\(2\)\(b\)](#), to be imposed to promote the achievement of the WSA Objectives. Those terms and conditions would be deemed to be imposed under the specified enactment. Decision support tools should be contemplated and planned before WSA Objectives are approved, where feasible. Decision support tools may also be developed and implemented once WSA Objectives are in place, if a need arises.

f) Seeking Approval of a WSA Objectives Recommendation Submission

WSA Objectives come into force by regulation in accordance with an order signed by LGIC, or by policy through a decision signed by the defined decision makers. A draft WSA Objectives Recommendations Submission must be endorsed by the project partners (e.g., First Nations and other government partners) before it is submitted to the Province for approval as a regulation or a policy. It is recommended that each partner follows the appropriate approval mechanism within their own governance structure before making a decision about whether to endorse the submission or not.

If endorsement cannot be reached by any of the parties, then the draft WSA Objectives and Recommendation Submission will need to be revisited until parties are satisfied, or there may be an agreement to cease the work.

Notice, Consultation, and FPIC

The Working Group will ensure that other parties, both within and outside government, who may be adversely impacted by the WSA Objectives have been engaged, consulted with, or received notice of the proposal before submission to the approver.

FPIC should be sought from the same First Nations that were engaged during the proposal to initiate the project. These expressions of consent will be considered by the Working Group and reflected in their recommendation to the approver.

WSA Objectives Approved as Regulation

The Lieutenant Governor in Council (LGIC) is the final decision making body for WSA Objectives regulations through Order in Council⁴. Working Group members may engage within their respective governance structure to coordinate a recommendation for the drafting of the regulation, which the LGIC may take into consideration.

WSA Objectives Approved as Policy

Approving WSA Objectives as policy may be a shared decision between the project partners, or a decision made by the Executive Director (WLRS) or equivalent⁵. The decision to approve should be undertaken according to the governance structure in place, and mirror the process taken to approve the proposal to initiate the WSA Objectives project.

Phase 5) Implementing WSA Objectives and Strategies

The objective of this phase is to communicate and implement the approved WSA Objectives. Key and technical deliverables include outreach and implementation and the implementation strategies.

Communication and Outreach

A summary of the approved WSA Objectives should be communicated at a minimum to:

- All parties involved in the development of the WSA Objectives,
- Provincial government ministries and staff,
- Local governments,
- First Nations within WSA Objectives area,
- Community representatives and regional groups,

⁴ Recall: WSA Objectives implemented as regulation carry statutory authority to influence statutory decisions, as designated in the Order in Council.

⁵ Recall: WSA Objectives implemented as policy do not carry statutory authority to influence statutory decisions. Policies act as guidelines, guidance or best practices.

- Those who will be affected by or need to consider the WSA Objectives, and
- Representatives of industries or business sectors.

Implementation

The Working Group will ensure that WSA Objectives are implemented collaboratively, with all project partners contributing. WSA Objectives must be implemented in accordance with the regulation or policy under which they were enacted. Implementation will vary depending on the values that are being protected; the statutes, decision makers and statutory decisions involved; and the implementation strategies deployed.

Implementation may also include non-regulatory strategies deemed appropriate by the Working Group such as an education campaign, restoration initiatives, monitoring programs, etc.

Upon approval of WSA Objectives, regional districts and municipalities can consider incorporating the objectives into their regional growth strategies and official community plans respectively, as prescribed in the regulation or policy.

Strategies to implement the WSA Objectives may need to be developed, and may include new supporting policy, guidelines or agreements. Further guidance on developing implementation strategies is provided in the [Technical Guidance](#).

Application of WSA Objectives on private or Crown land

Under [WSA s. 43\(2\)\(a\)](#), WSA Objectives by regulation may require a public officer making a specified decision under a specified enactment to consider the objective(s) when making a decision. Whether the WSA Objective applies to private or Crown land will depend on the statutory authority of the specified decision. For example, a water licence may be issued on private and Crown land under the WSA; therefore, if a WSA decision maker must consider a WSA Objective when deciding on a water licence, then WSA Objectives has the potential to influence the water licence decision on private or Crown land.

WSA Objectives in Planning

Even when not formally specified in a regulation, it is recommended that any future planning initiatives by provincial, local, regional, or First Nations governments that overlap with the area selected for WSA Objectives, align with the WSA Objectives that are in place.

Phase 6) Monitoring and Adaptive Management

The objective of this phase is to conduct periodic review and evaluation for the new WSA Objectives. Key and technical deliverables include monitoring reports and recommendations for enhancement. It is recommended that monitoring and adaptive management occurs to evaluate progress and identify opportunities for improvement. Monitoring may also be an opportunity to evaluate the validity of assumptions made in analysis and strategy development.

Scheduling for monitoring and the agency responsible will be outlined in the Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan, included within the WSA Objectives Recommendation Submission. Monitoring to evaluate progress towards meeting or refining WSA Objectives should rely on existing monitoring programs and data sources wherever feasible. Responsibility for WSA Objective monitoring and evaluation may be shared with development partners such as First Nations or local governments.

More information on Monitoring and Adaptive Management is provided in the [Technical Guidance document](#).

APPENDIX A: CRITERIA FOR REVIEWING PROPOSALS TO INITIATE

The considerations the Province will use to evaluate a proposal to initiate a WSA Objectives are:

- An identifiable issue or priority exists that cannot effectively be addressed through current approaches, or a clear opportunity exists to shape the trajectory of a watershed;
- The high-level summary of key watershed values that were provided in the proposal are clear and align with WSA Objectives requirements;
- Consent of partner or other First Nations, and engagement undertaken to obtain it;
- Whether there is a clear mandate from the initiating entity(-ies) and support from other influential groups or organizations within the project area;
- Known risks or conflicts within the area have been identified and listed;

Before making a decision to endorse or not endorse the proposal, the Province will ensure that ministries whose legislation could be impacted by the development of WSA Objectives have been engaged on the proposal.

Resourcing support from project partners is desirable but is not a primary criterion. Resourcing for local involvement will vary and availability of resourcing should not inhibit discussions about objective setting.

The key questions (Table B) are related to the criteria the Province will use when assessing the proposal to initiate a WSA Objectives project.

Table B. Questions for Assessing the Proposal to Initiate the WSA Objectives Project

Criteria	Questions
Identifying the Issue or Priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the proposal identified a clear issue or opportunity that can be attributed to a specific area? (or is it a general/widespread issue)? • What other initiatives have/can be considered for addressing the problem or goal? • What are the main economic drivers in the area of interest? To what extent might an Objective(s) impact them (e.g., timber supply, access to subsurface resources, etc.)? • Can the issue(s) be defensibly demonstrated? Has another initiative or program demonstrated the problem (e.g. cumulative effects report or health assessment)? • How could WSA Objectives address the issue or opportunity?
A viable assessment approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are data sources identified and available or can they reasonably be obtained to make assessments about water quantity, water quality or aquatic ecosystems, as needed?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we determine that human activities are contributing to identified issues or opportunities and these are these activities regulated by statutory decisions?
Executive Mandate and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What level of executive support is demonstrated in the proposal? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. From the Province of British Columbia? ii. From Regional, Local Government(s) or Local Trusts? iii. From First Nations Government(s)? iv. From the Government of Canada?
External Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a partnership desirable (emergency situations may influence this answer)? • Is there a First Nations partner and have they been contacted? • Is there a local government partner and have they been contacted? • Are there any other partners identified? • Are there organizations that represent major interests in the area that should be represented in WSA Objectives development?
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the proposal identified any risks to the success of developing WSA Objectives? • Are there any ongoing litigation or strategic agreements in the area that could confine the scope of a WSA Objectives project (e.g. with First Nations)? • Are there any insurmountable conflicts in the area that would prevent development of WSA Objectives (e.g. between key parties)?
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> i.

APPENDIX B: Roles and Responsibilities in WSA Objectives Development

Table C. Roles and Responsibilities in WSA Objectives development process

Role	Key Responsibilities, as described in this policy
Initiating Entity	Undertakes initial work to prepare a WSA Objectives proposal, including identifying issues and priorities, and potential partners in the area of interest, and that WSA Objectives are the best tool to respond to the issues identified in the proposal.
The Lieutenant Governor in Council (LGIC)	Approves regulations establishing WSA Objectives
WLRS Executive Director or Equivalent	Endorses the initiation of a WSA Objectives project for the Province and approves WSA Objectives as policy
First Nations	(Variable roles) Participate or co-lead a WSA Objectives project, depending on capacity and interest.
Project Manager	Designated Project Manager or related role to lead and manage the project.
Project Sponsors	Initiates a WSA Objectives project, manages the work of the Working Group and endorses a WSA Objectives proposal before it goes for decision. Project sponsors may include an executive staff member within provincial government, local government or a First Nation council member
Working Group	Manages and undertakes work related to developing WSA Objectives and follows the directions of the project sponsors
Technical Advisory Group	Undertakes and manages the technical aspects of developing WSA Objectives
Watershed Advisory Group	Acts as the primary entity for engagement and communication between the Working Group and parties outside the Working Group that might benefit from or be otherwise impacted by WSA Objectives development
Statutory Decision Makers	Consider WSA Objectives in their statutory decisions, as outlined by the WSA Objectives regulation or policy.
Watershed Community members	Contributes to perspectives on values and priorities for the watershed during engagement discussions; will vary by community and watershed.

Optional supportive roles (not prescribed) include: facilitator(s), communications staff (including Government Communications and Public Engagement), and contractors who support Working and Advisory Groups.